a Dedorn Dog Book 1/6

Stories by A Gold Star Secret & friends: Volume 1

Geoff Towner

CONTENTS

pre-Gold Star (1996-1997)

Bright-Eyed Girl 3
Safety Net 4
Finger Cramps 5
Song In K Major 6
Shutdown '97 (Close To The End) 7

Constella-Sheep (1997)

Beautiful Loser 9
Mantra Ray 10
No-Fi Flyer 11
King Hate 12
Love Bites & Knife Wounds 13
They Weren't Aliens 14

unreleased electronic album (1997-1998)

Rust 16
Honesty Is The Best Police-State 17

Naked With A Blue Light (1998-2000)

Unhappy Camper 19
The Fall 20
The Observationist 21
Travelling Sewerside Blues 22
Those Who Refuse To Believe In Magic 23
Red 24
Love Lost & Found 25
Weakender 26

Credits

PRE-GOLD STAR

(1996-1997)

BRIGHT-EYED GIRL

I'm like a frame that's fallen down.
I know, when I hear that sound.
Your voice makes me want to feel like
falling in love.
But what is love?

A melancholy girl
illuminates my world.
A bright-eyed kind of girl
enables my heart to unfurl.

An' you said that I am just like you.
I know, the sadness rings so true.
Wear our "happy faces" for the benefit
of those we love.
But what is love?

A melancholy girl
illuminates my world.
A bright-eyed kind of girl
enables my heart to unfurl.

Between the days of my teenage metal band
The Dead Tree (1990-1992) and the recording of this in 1996,
all my songwriting was recorded straight to ghetto blaster.
These "boombox years" I see more as "training" than songwriting.
However... this song I see as the REAL beginning of trying to
create "decent" songs, even though it reads amateurishly now.
The song is based on a conversation had
with a friend, on a train, in Adelaide.
Scrapped early titles were "B.B." and "You're Like Me".

SAFETY NET

I can't give you higher adoration.
Beautiful in every respect.
I owe you more than just my affection,
for keeping me from falling to their depth.

"Nothin' comes from doin' nothin'", I say.
Someone doin' somethin' makes a difference in a big way.

I can't live without
"you know who I'm on about".
It has to be that way.
I don't know what to say.
I don't know what to do,
thinkin' about "you-know-who"
24 hours a day.
(But it's) better for me this way.

"Nothin' comes from doin' nothin'", I say.
Someone doin' somethin' makes a difference in a big way.

(There's this thing in my head and it looks like you,
and there's this other thing in my head and it looks like you,
and there's this other thing in my head and it looks like you.)

It's difficult trying to "pin down"
what a song is about, so long after it was written.
I know this is about a friend who helped me
emotionally deal with my feelings for another,
but the specifics elude me.
And I have the suspicion that the specifics are important.
The final lines were ripped off from a
newspaper cartoon too, I think...
I went through many (woeful) titles before settling on "Safety Net":
"For A Fellow Victim", "Assister (A Sister)" and "Beautiful Person".

FINGER CRAMPS

You draw me in,
encaptured eyes.
Keeps me spellbound for half an hour, or so.
Your passion shows.
Enraptured hearts
brings me up in my bluest of blue days.

It's here and now,
just you and me,
no one else is here for you to see.
You focus in
and take the pain
an' let it all come out. Then you run away.
You run away.

A gentle soul,
and not afraid
to flash a smile at me, even when on stage.
A book of songs
that can't be lost,
(it says) "music is the only constant in my life".

It's here and now,
just you and me,
no one else is here for you to see.
You focus in
and take the pain
an' let it all come out. Then you run away.
You run away.

Written for Fiona McCartney-Hood
of the Luton Girls Choir.
DC loved this one...

SONG IN K MAJOR

Remember when I first saw you,
it was at a Hummer show.
You smiled.
It was my birthday.
Remember your first words to me,
“I saw you on the bus this morning”.
Yeah,
didn’t know what to say!

I remember little things like that.

Remember our first conversation.
Talked for hours and didn’t mention
your name.
It was your birthday.
Remember our first soul connection.
Screamfeeder song dedication,
embracing,
and then you kissed me.

I remember little things like that.
Stupid little things, I remember like that.

It comes as no surprise.
The fire in your eyes
never fails to make me smile.
It makes me feel alive
when I’m by your side.
I don’t want to say goodbye.
Goodbye.

Hummer were a Sydney-based indie rock band.
Screamfeeder are a Brisbane-based indie rock band.
I’ve heard K major was a secret chord...
Very early working titles were the very simple “K” and
“Insight #1”, which I’m sure is a “Celestine Prophecy” reference.

SHUTDOWN ‘97 (CLOSE TO THE END)

Hold on.
Slow.
Feel
kinda outta breath.
Can’t speak.
Losing control
and losing you.
Clouded vision
and clouded mind.
Help me.

My life in the balance
of a most macabre dance,
and you know I kinda like the darkness.
A white light.
I’m so comfortable.
Open my eyes.
Here I lie in your arms,
hopin’ for your love and charms,
but I doubt it‘s ever gonna happen.
That’s alright.
I’m just thankful for
bein’ alive.

One night around May 1997, while having dinner
with friends in Surry Hills, I stood up, had a seizure,
and the next thing I knew I was
looking up at my friends from the floor.
The next day I took the day off work, got tests done,
went to Bon’s house and wrote & recorded this song.
Recorded with two cassette decks, it was the first time
that Bon and I had done something together outside of el Mopa.
A couple of months later we started A Gold Star Secret.
Possibly the most harrowing song I ever wrote,
it has never been released, but it might appear on a
future Gold Star rarities compilation. Maybe.
The title is a reference to Melbourne garage rock band Shutdown 66.
Bon’s original title on the tape was “Geoff’s Sad Song”.

CONSTELLA-SHEEP

(1997)

BEAUTIFUL LOSER

The comforts of madness
carry me to new heights,
as I choke on forgiveness.
Is there any coming down
from the corner of the ceiling?
‘Cause you put me here, put me here.

In love.
Endgame.

The forces are against us.
Faces gathered at the window.
Can you feel the guilt drain?
I think I found a way home,
but I can’t tell for all the
scars closing my eyes.

In love.
Endgame.

The first song that Bon and I recorded as A Gold Star Secret.
I was reading a book about Phil Spector and his Gold Star Studios,
and thought “A Gold Star Spectre” was an okay band name.
I think it was Bon’s idea to change it to “A Gold Star Secret”.
He’s an oustanding editor.
“Beautiful Loser” is a reference to Jack Kirby’s Beautiful Dreamer,
from the Forever People, published by DC Comics.
It wasn’t ‘til years later I was gifted a Leonard Cohen
book called “Beautiful Losers”. I had no idea!
The first line is a Pale Saints reference.
The nightmarish quality of the lyrics in general was highly influenced
by what I thought I heard Andy Marks singing about in Lunarcide.

MANTRA RAY

I recall older days
with you at my heel.
It wasn't that long ago
when love seemed so real.
You showed me a mantra
that healed old wounds,
and once you have something good,
it's over too soon.

And it feels so wrong
with you hand in hand
with someone I have to ask,
"Is she good in bed?"

As past comes to present.
Recovering well.
And when I'm let outta here,
you never can tell...

It feels so wrong
with you hand in hand
with someone I have to ask,
"Is she good in bed?"

Unrequited love is a bitch.
The title is a reference to the
Pixies b-side "Manta Ray".

NO-FI FLYER

Come down! Fall into a situation,
when you're falling for an angel you can't have.
No fun! Splintering your full emotion,
but you're keeping at the danger that you desire.
I know the kinda fool you wanna be.
I am the kinda fool you wanna be. Shit…

Don't get me started.
Fallen the hardest.
He didn't even have a chance, yeah.
He didn't even have a chance.
Don't get me started.
I'm not retarded.
He didn't even have a chance, yeah.
He didn't even have a chance.

Now you're locked yourself away from it.
Can't stand the sound of heaven's voice when she calls.
It's all paranoia, stupid games,
when yr convinced that you're insane. I know yr not.
I know the kinda fool you had to be.
I was the kinda fool you had to be. Shit…

Don't get me started.
Fallen the hardest.
He didn't even have a chance, yeah.
He didn't even have a chance.
Don't get me started.
I'm not retarded.
He didn't even have a chance, yeah.
He didn't even have a chance.

There seems to be a little bit of a theme of
unrequited love leading to mental health problems
in this batch of songs.
I think the title was inspired by
Melbourne band My Sci-Flyer.

KING HATE

It's hard sometimes to just abide
an egocentric fuck.
Don't like to let the hate arise,
especially when I'm drunk.
The way you sleaze your way around
blinded, star-eyed sluts.
But that's okay, 'cause I can feel
my hands aching to cut.

Fortune presents the man with none
gifts for getting even.
My resolve won't weaken.
In time I wait for your first move.
"Hold me down", I ask you,
while I've still got sense to...

Don't expect me to pretend I like you.
Don't expect all yr friends to back you,
yeah...

This song is a bit embarrasing in hindsight.
And uncharacteristically violent.
But yeah, I REALLY hated this certain guy,
in a certain band,
who had a certain hold
over a certain someone.
Later on I was much more forgiving of the fella,
but have recently discovered that my
initial instincts were correct.

LOVE BITES & KNIFE WOUNDS

Come closer to me.
Let your soul lamp shine
in my location.
Don't let me go home alone.
Don't let me out.

Real love
flows deeper in you.
I'm empty for you.

Get further from me.
Pull your sharp blade out
from my limp torso.
Don't let me fade out alone.
Don't let me die.

Real love
flows deeper in you.
I'm empty for you.

Originally intended as a Madonna-ish
love song but in the style of Red House Painters,
it soon enough got subverted somewhat.
Love and betrayal in a simple haiku-inspired form.

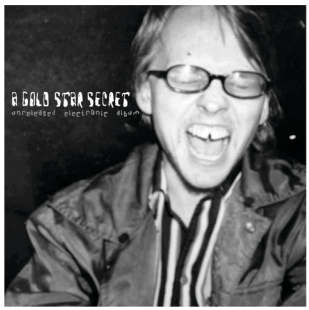
THEY WEREN'T ALIENS

Those were times.
Dreams were more.
Waking standing.
Sheets were shrouds.
Dizzy heights
and blood-stained clothes.
Pin-pricked finger.
Dreams were more…

Now it's alright,
'cause they weren't aliens,
and in a way, it's a shame…

Goodbye dear brother,
safe journey on your stride.

The oldest of the Constella-songs,
the initial idea pre-dated the Pyrmont Bridge Road house
where it was recorded, and was born in a house in
Camperdown shared by Tanith and I.
Inspired by Will Oldham and PJ Harvey,
it came outta nowhere during a rehearsal for
an "anti-electric" Hummer show where I was guesting
on keyboards, acoustic guitar, shortwave radio,
and water-filled glasses!
The song's a true story.
One morning when we both still lived at home,
my brother woke up standing on his bed, sheet wrapped around
himself like a toga, and wih a pin-prick of blood on his finger.
He was convinced it was aliens.



UNRELEASED ELECTRONIC ALBUM

(1997-1998)

RUST

I don't want to feel your pain anymore.
I don't need to be in chains, on your score card.
Manipulated by emotions.
The buzzing taken away by nothing but you.

I'm not getting caught in the rain.
I am not going to let it rust me.
I'm not getting caught in the rain, yeah.
I am not going to let it rust me.

I am flying free as a bird, on my own.
I have confidence I'm sure. I'm alone now.
Captivated by no emotion.
The buzzing incessant now I'm missing you... 'cause

I'm not getting caught in the rain.
I am not going to let it rust me.
I'm not getting caught in the rain, yeah.
I am not going to let it rust me.

The first "proper" song that Bon & I recorded for
our aborted electronic album in 1997-1998,
after a handful of experimental try-outs & learning exercises.
A trip-hop song highly influenced by Portishead & Tricky.
The original vocals were sung by me in a "mock" Tricky style
and sounded pretty woeful.
So we got Tanith to do the vocals instead,
which was just so much better.
And she brought a few vocal ideas to the track as well.
The song is about finally having the guts to
sever the ties after heartbreak,
even if it's not without consequences.
Very early rough titles for the track were
"Deeply Drained" and "Rusted By Numbers".

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICE-STATE

Sweet surrender never felt so bad.
Friendly forces joining the jihad,
just like balsa wood security.
Paranoia. They got it in for me.

I need advice
(on) how to try
(and) fly, fly away.

Heavenly hostess sings Hallelujah,
serving reheats on a ship to yonder star.
Those with wolf fangs nibble at your toes.
They're just children, born of broken homes.

I need advice
(on) how to try
(and) fly, fly away.

Bon & I recorded the music to this song
at the same time we did "Rust",
but I didn't write or record the lyrics
for quite a time afterward.
And they're terrible, TERRIBLE lyrics
that make no sense at all,
desperately trying to be clever & Radiohead.
Political statements have never been my forté,
even when wedded with science fiction.
Bon's working title before the lyrics were ever written
was simply "Geoff?... ".

NAKED WITH A BLUE LIGHT

(1998-2000)

UNHAPPY CAMPER

Lately (I've) been comin' down
with a kind of sickness you just can't go on about.
Maybe it'll be okay,
but yr not convincin' when yr eyes always dart away.

Love's around the corner.
I just wanna be with her.

Baby? Can I call you that?
If I can't, I understand, just put down the baseball bat.
Save me from myself.
It's the Devil in me that keeps me playin' out this Hell.

Love's around the corner.
I just wanna be with her.
Love's around the corner.
I just wanna be with her.

Send her on home to me.

A positive... yet negative... song about love?
Well, about ALMOST being in love, I guess.
I can't remember.
It reminds me of a person I unintentionally hurt though.
Possibly the first reference to the Devil in my songs?
He gets around.
And makes a lot of appearances henceforth.

THE FALL

If I could, I'd try to get myself out of this rut I'm in.
Feels like forever
since I've tasted freedom
on the other side.
I know I could get out if I really wanted it to be.
Feels like a prison
with no escape
to the other side.

Now comes a chance that I can't let slip away.
Now, a second chance that I can't let go
if I wanna dance with another girl
and it's time. It's time for leavin',
and I won't be grievin' for you,
and that's the truth.

If you can be free,
then who says I can't be?
If you can be free,
then what's stoppin' everyone but you and me?

Now I know that fate can deal a hand, you've got to take a leap.
Feels like a new life
when you embrace freedom
on the other side.
But you know tomorrow is another day of drudgery.
Feels like a routine
with just a dream
of the other side.

It's about quitting a job that is not doing you any favours.
Early working titles were
"Big quick moving into the fall one" and "Lonely Man".
We shortened the first working title to just "The Fall",
I think because of the whole "fall of man" biblical connotations.

THE OBSERVATIONIST

Caught in dazzlin'
eyes that shine,
lit up like candlelights. Who could put up a fight?
Eyes like fire.
Outside, left behind
longtime friends of mine.
Inside, it's a sight!
Dead wood brought to life! ...then gets thrown aside.

Better off in a bubble.
Better off inside observing.
Better off agoraphobic.
Better off inside observing.
It cuts me up when you cut me down,
so cut it out, but don't cut me...

I don't wanna get that hurt again.
Even though life's pretty good,
life could be a hell of a lot better.
A hell of a lot better.

I don't really wanna get back inside.
Even though it's kinda safe,
it could be a hell of a lot safer.
A hell of a lot safer.

Got to learn to accept that it is over.

Radiohead inspired epic song that goes for too long.
The original line that ended the "chorus" was
"but don't cut me off"
but Bon suggsted cutting off the "off" so that the "off" is aurally cut off.
A joke that only us two would know.
And I don't think "Observationist" is an actual word.
Like I said, Radiohead inspired clever-clogs silliness.
Oh, and it's about the comforts of voyeurism after being dumped.
Early unofficial titles were "Geoff's new big one",
"Epic" and "Leave You Hanging".

TRAVELLING SEWERSIDE BLUES

It's not down to gettin'
up at the right time,
more so the window of opportunity
passin' me right by.
A helpless heart can't be fallin' apart,
it's a drag.
I can't help but feel that somethin' this unreal's
fucked up from the start.

It's not up to bein'
down every day of my life,
more so a glass empty, rather than a
glass full, kinda guy.
A helpless heart can't always be dark,
it's a drag.
I can't help but feel that somethin' this unreal's
fucked up from the start.

The title is a reference to Led Zeppelin's "Travelling Riverside Blues",
with a bit of "clever" wordplay on Sewerside/Suicide,
which is itself ANOTHER reference:
to my brother's pre-Gerling band Sewerside Steel.
There's a bit in the intro riff that reminds me
of the Zep song, hence the title.

THOSE WHO REFUSE TO BELIEVE IN MAGIC

See that man?
Doesn't need to ever think out loud.
He's happier than a man
who's just jumped off that proverbial cloud.
Doesn't need to dream.
Doesn't need to ruin such a picture fine.
Cash keeps comin' in,
keepin' comfort in every single time.

But did you really know
it's all just a fuckin' show.
He's a faker, he's a taker,
he's a heartbreaker.

Those who refuse to believe in magic suffer most.

See that girl?
Doesn't need to ever fall in love.
She's stronger than her old man,
who's busy talkin' to the Lord above.
Doesn't need to feel.
Doesn't need to let loose once in a while.
Guys keep comin' in,
keepin' at her heels every single time.

But did you really know
it's all just a fuckin' show.
She's a faker, she's a taker,
she's a heartbreaker.

Those who refuse to believe in magic suffer most.

I think my strengths lie in writing about matters of the heart,
rather than any kind of pseudo-social commentary.
This is probably way more heavy-handed than it should be.
Still... Darren Hanlon likened it to Jonathan Richman,
and Fran from the Cannanes mentioned Neil Young... so that's a plus!
Bon's tracking notes for the then untitled song
call the track "Rocks out like Crazy Horse".
(Note: a few repeated future lyrical motifs make their debut here.)

RED

It's never easy lettin' go.
Steelin' up is even harder.
Why'd ya have to make it so,
turn yourself into a martyr?
That's the only way I know
of ensuring I'll be smarter.
How do you expect to grow?
I hope ya know what you're doin'...

If this is all love and war, I surrender now.
If this is all what it's for, I surrender now.
And can we ever be sure of what's comin' 'round?
'Cause nothin's fair in love and war. I surrender now.

It gets easier as it goes,
keepin' feelings undercover.
Now you're cold down to your toes.
What you really need's a lover.
It's too late for that, you know,
I don't think I'll find another.
It's never late for change, although
I think I know what you're doin'...

After all that's been said,
we're forever ending head-to-head.
That's the other thing that I dread:
one of us is bound to wind up dead.
There are brighter skies up ahead,
if we learn to make up instead.
Doesn't mean we end up in bed.
Anything to stop me seein' red.

First ever attempt at a duet.
The italicised lines are for the female vocal,
which more than adeptly performed by Tanith Sherman,
on both the recording and live shows circa 1999.
The lyrics are in part inspired by her, so it seemed apt.
Very early working titles were "Very mellow Sea Life Park one" and
"Weighed Down South", a misheard reference to
Eric Clapton's "Lay Down Sally".

LOVE LOST & FOUND

It's been hard to come around
to your way of always keepin' me to ground.
I guess I could put it down
to another case of love lost and found.

You curse in vain
because your heart's in pain.
It's that time again.

I don't know where you are,
you can't be all that far?
It don't have to be so hard,
you're catchin' me off guard.
It ain't the strippers or the bars.
You're a sparklin' star.

You curse in vain
because your heart's in pain.

You could beat me to the ground,
but y'know that I would never make a sound.
Even when you got me bound,
I could always put it down
to a case of love lost and found.

Originally written as an instrumental, with the intention
to get Crow's Peter Fenton to write the lyrics and sing on.
He expressed interest, but I think I got too self-conscious
and ended up doing it myself.
Originally the line was "you're a shining star"
but Bon suggested "sparkling".
Can't recall why he said that, but it's an improvement.
Initial working titles were (obviously) "Peter Fenton one"
and the hilarious "Dark Prince Of The Inner West",
a one-time nickname for Fenton by my friends and I.

WEAKENDER

I look forward to weekends,
'cause that's when we come alive.
Even if we don't sleep in,
I can sure think of somethin' that can keep us occupied.

After five days o' hell, it's a relief
to see your smile waitin' for me.

I anticipate weekends,
but I'd like more of your time.
We create our own Eden,
takin' turns to keep each other satisfied.

After an eternity, it's a relief
to feel human for the first time in years.
Two days of paradise, five days of shit.
I'll see you again in a week.

An uncharacteristically cheery, even saucy (!) song.
When intimacy comes after a spate of celibacy,
it can do that to you.
Slight biblical references are starting
to make their presence known.
Pre-lyric-writing working titles were
"Fucked up Hoss intro one" and "Head Like A Hull".

CREDITS

pre-Gold Star
Thanks to Adam “Wes” Gregorace & Bon King.

Constella-Sheep
Front cover photo taken by Geoff Towner.
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unreleased electronic album
Front cover photo taken by Bon King.

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a Dedorn Dog Book

Stories by A Gold Star Secret & friends: Volume 1

This collection compiles Geoff's lyrical contribution to 2 albums by A Gold Star Secret (as well as a number of other songs from the period), in chronological order, recorded between 1996 and 2000.

The first 4 songs were recorded under the name Even Deeper in July 1996 and not widely released.
"Shutdown '97" was the first song recorded by Geoff & Bon in May 1997, pre-dating A Gold Star Secret by a few months, and has not been released.
The album "Constella-Sheep" was recorded in July 1997, and released in 1999.
"Rust" and "Honesty Is The Best Police-State" were recorded for an aborted electronic album by A Gold Star Secret. Recorded in 1997-1998, the album remains unfinished and shelved.
"Naked With A Blue Light" was largely recorded between 1998 and 2000, and was initially digitally released in 2008, then again in 2012, and finally saw a physical release in 2023.

Geoff Towner is a middle-aged, washed-up, has-been singer/songwriter/musician/artist/archivist/father/failure/dickhead who hates writing songs. His music has been likened to Will Oldham, Bill Callahan, Mark Kozelek, Jason Molina, Leonard Cohen, Robert Wyatt, Nick Cave & Bon Iver.

"Anyone who can read should buy this. It's a gut-wrenching ride, but people with constipation need that sometimes." - local celebrity Tom Adamson

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